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PROGRAM ABC World News Tonight STATION WJLA TV
ABC Network

DATE December 30, 1981 7:00 PM CITY Washington, D. C.

SUBJECT Conspiracy to Assassinate the Pope

PETER JENNINGS: In other news overseas, Pope John Paul -- he was again today worried publicly about Poland. At Vatican City, he told his weekly audience anxiety about the situation in his native country was increasing. He spoke particularly of his trepidation and concern for those Poles arrested under martial law.

Last spring, it was at an outdoors audience in St. Peter's Square that John Paul was shot by Mehmed Ali Agca. At Agca's trial, there was talk of a conspiracy. ABC's Bill Blakemore on special assignment has been pursuing evidence. In this report tonight, some results of his investigation.

BILL BLAKEMORE: Italian investigators now believe Ali Agca had at least two accomplices with him in St. Peter's Square that day and support from others outside of Italy. ABC News has learned that this man standing next to Agca just before the shooting, and his face still visible just below Agca's gun at the moment of firing, has now been identified by Turkish authorities as this man, named Omar I, a wanted Turkish terrorist and longtime associate of Agca. Omar I disappeared from St. Peter's Square that day and is still at large. But investigations into a third possible accomplice in the square are more surprising.

Lowell Newton of Detroit, Michigan was a tourist in St. Peter's Square on the day of the shooting and was flown back here to Rome this week by Italian authorities to give evidence, which the presiding judge has told me is now of extreme importance in the case. He reconstructed for us what he told the judge.

LOWELL NEWTON: I was standing on top of the fountain to get a better view, had just raised the camera and taken one

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picture of the Pope before the gunfire. I lowered the camera and heard three gunshots -- pop, pop, pop -- in rapid succession, raised the camera and took another photograph, then jumped down from the fountain, came over this direction about ten feet, when suddenly I saw a young man running out of the crowd toward me. He had a gun in his right hand. I later drew a sketch of the man with the gun. My wife and the friends travelling with us also saw him with the gun. As he ran past, I turned quickly, took one photograph of him from ten feet away. I chased him for about 20 feet, stopped, took one more photograph from about 20 feet away. Then the young man and the gun disappeared in the columns behind the colonade.

BLAKEMORE: ABC News has learned Turkish authorities are sure this man is not Omar I, the man who was standing next to Agca. And there is a surprising new lead about who this third man may be.

At this point, the story becomes almost bizarre. We learned this morning that Turkish authorities and the American FBI are investigating the possibility that the pointed-nosed man with the gun Lowell Newton saw in St. Peter's Square could be the same as this man. This is one of the five identicate pictures which appeared on ABC and Time magazine and elsewhere as members of a reported Libyan hit squad sent to America to kill President Reagan.

When we showed Lowell Newton the magazine identicate pictures this morning in our ABC Rome Bureau, without telling him why, he immediately pointed to the same man on the page and said "Now this looks like the man I saw in St. Peter's." A few minutes later for our camera, he explained why.

NEWTON: The thin nose and the lips, pursed and tense. But the face, the oblong issue of the face, is the primary thing.

BLAKEMORE: There are other suspected conspirators who may not have been in St. Peter's Square that day. Of all of Ali Agca's well-financed travels through Europe before the shooting, it is the 50 days he spent at luxury hotels in Bulgaria that investigators find most interesting.

Here, by Ali Agca's own admission, he met two men, a Turkish gun smuggler named Omar Mercene (?) and a Bulgarian who gave his name as Mustafa Ahof (?). Agca admits meeting these same two men in Tunisia three months later. Police believe the Bulgarian Ahof may have had a central role in planning the shooting. From the Tunisian meeting of these two, Agca, using false identities, launched a new series of constant travels in and around Italy, which ended with the assassination attempt.

Finally, Ali Agca himself remains the most tantalizing mystery keeping his secrets. Prison sources tell ABC Agca was a model prisoner up until a couple of weeks ago, even gardening five or six hours a day. But on December 20th, he began the hunger strike he had threatened if he weren't given a new trial. High Italian of-

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ficials say he's become restless and impatient. They believe Agca was promised an escape from prison by his co-conspirators. Now that Agca knows that escape is unlikely here, authorities plan to face him with evidence of the plot to see if he'll begin to talk.

Bill Blakemore, ABC News, in Rome.